

**City of Warwick Planning Board
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 14, 2011**

Members Present: John J. Mulhearn Jr., Chairman
Philip Slocum
Laura Pisaturo
Cynthia Gerlach
Sue Stenhouse
Vincent Gambardella
Thomas Kiernan

Members Absent: Leah Prata
James Desmarais

Also in attendance: Patricia Reynolds, Business Development Planner
Peter Ruggiero, Solicitor
Ben Carlson, Goody Clancy

Chairman Mulhearn called the meeting to order at 6:00P.M.

The June and August meeting minutes were presented for review and approval. Ms. Pisaturo asked to have the comment on Page 2, 4th paragraph corrected to state "...negatively impact and make more properties nonconforming" and to correct the spelling of her name. A motion was made by Ms. Stenhouse to accept the June minutes with these corrections. The motion was seconded by Ms. Gerlach. All voted in favor, none opposed, with Mr. Mulhearn and Mr. Slocum abstaining.

A motion was made by Mr. Gambardella to approve the August meeting minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Ms. Stenhouse. All voted in favor, none opposed, with Mr. Slocum and Mr. Kiernan abstaining.

Public Hearing

Planning Board Adoption of Warwick Station Development District

Master Plan

and

**The Adoption of the Warwick Station Development District Master Plan as
an element of the City's Comprehensive Plan**

Applicant: City of Warwick
Location: Warwick Station Redevelopment District
Assessor's Plat: Portions of 278, 279, 322, and 323
Lot(s): All lots located within the Intermodal and Gateway Zones
Existing Zones: Intermodal, Gateway
Proposed Zone: No change to existing zoning

Mr. Gambardella recused himself due to a conflict of interest.

Mr. DePasquale read background information into the record. Mr. Ben Carlson, from the consulting firm Goody, Clancy & Associates was introduced and presented a power point slide show on the Warwick Station Development District (WSDD) Master Plan. This presentation was an overview of the core elements of the District. At the conclusion of the presentation, the following discussion took place.

Mr. DePasquale explained that the Board is considering the contents of the Master Plan and determining if the Master Plan is consistent with the principles of the Board. He also explained that there could be additional amendments by the City Council.

Attorney Ruggiero stated that the Planning Board is putting in place a mechanism that would have projects within the Development District heard by the Planning Board in the future. When this is before the City Council, the Planning Board's recommendation will be considered, but the City Council could amend this to hear projects before the Council.

Mr. DePasquale stated the WSDD is trying to move away from some of the existing uses and the City is proposing a plan that supports multimodes of transit. He explained that it is advantageous to focus uses as close to each other as possible and as Mr. Carlson stated in the presentation, it is important to focus the area of the District to create a sense of activity.

Attorney Ruggiero stated that if the Master Plan is approved, the Board can revisit the boundaries at a later time. Mr. DePasquale agreed, and explained that expanding the boundaries would require rezoning the area, which would be a different process.

The Chair asked Mr. DePasquale to go over the results of the staff meetings that were held with individual Board members and Planning Staff during the previous month and to provide a summary of the concerns raised. Mr. DePasquale reviewed a prepared memo and presented a draft version of possible amendments to the Master Plan based on the individual meetings for the full Board's consideration and review:

The issues for discussion were as follows:

1. Transportation/Traffic concerns

The Master Plan should better articulate the constraints and deficiencies along Post Road and Jefferson Boulevard infrastructure including lanes of travel and deficiencies in the slip ramps to and from the airport connector in the vicinity of the redevelopment district. The master plan should state the limitations of the proposed "build out" scenarios based on the existing roadway infrastructure. The Master Plan should also include a more detailed discussion and support for long term transportation infrastructure improvements necessary to support the full "build out" vision described in the Master Plan.

Potential amendment to Page 19, reads as follows:

“Based on this assessment, it was determined that the approximately 1.5 million square feet of development anticipated within the Intermodal Core Area could be supported by existing roadways, with modest improvements to key site access roadways and slip ramp improvements to and from the Airport Connector. Existing roadways can support additional development outside of the Core Area along Jefferson Boulevard and Kilvert Street but would require intermediate and long term transportation infrastructure improvements along Jefferson Blvd that will support the full “build out” of the Leviton and D’Ambra properties with a design that supports multi modal travel. Encourage development of an access management plan for the WSDD including exploring the feasibility of creating another east/west connection over the AMTRAK rail line between the District and the Airport Connector.

Immediate and desirable improvements include incorporating turning lanes at key entrances to the development and upgrading signals and adding pedestrian crosswalks throughout the District and in the areas immediately adjacent to the property.”

Discussion:

Mr. Mulhearn emphasized that he believes this the WSDD is a good concept and the area could be an economic boon for the City and State, but he has concerns about the amount of traffic that would be generated and whether the roadways would be able to support the potential traffic in and out of the area. He is concerned that this plan looks great on paper but may not work in reality. In reviewing other projects in this area, in particular the D’Ambra project, he recalls the full build out of that project would result in a degradation of the level of service (LOS) on Jefferson Blvd.

Mr. DePasquale stated that as projects are proposed, the Board will receive traffic studies. The City is also working with the Rhode Island Department of Transportation to provide networks for a variety of transportation options; to have the roadway accommodate bikes, pedestrians and cars. This multimodal aspect is an important component of the plan and allows the City to apply for grant money in the future. The Board can also put language into the Master Plan to address issues that may arise in the future and that recognize the needs of Jefferson Boulevard.

Mr. Slocum stated that he would like to go on record in support of development in this area, but that it should be done responsibly. Acknowledging that he is not a traffic expert, he recognizes that there could be a potential problem with traffic in the future and feels that it would be irresponsible not to address this issue.

Mr. DePasquale explained that there is potential grant money for redevelopment of the Elizabeth Mill and that a residential component of the Master Plan is important. Diverse income groups are necessary to provide users for the transit system and that as projects are proposed, it will be up to the Board to analyze the mix of the development.

2. Future Expansion--Intermodal District

The Master Plan should consider future expansion of the Intermodal District to include the block

or properties located north of Kilvert Street inclusive of Greystone Street, Cottage Street and Blackburn Street. Review of the land use in the area finds an inconsistent mix of industrial, retail, restaurant and residential uses. This block is in close proximity to the commuter rail station and maintains a prominent location at the corner of Kilvert Street and Jefferson Boulevard demanding consideration for a future extension of the intermodal district. Adding this neighborhood would alleviate some of the hardships present in the existing condition, while balancing the physical development at the intersection of Kilvert Street and Jefferson Boulevard. The forthcoming result is the development of a macro connectivity within the larger district that maximizes growth opportunities along the Jefferson Boulevard spine of the intermodal district.

Potential amendments:

Page 11, add boundary line to map “future expansion Intermodal or Gateway.”

Page 12, add new paragraph number 4

“Consider future expansion of the Intermodal or Gateway District to include the block of properties located north of Kilvert Street inclusive of Greystone Street, Cottage Street and Blackburn Street. Review of the land use in the area finds an inconsistent mix of industrial, retail, restaurant and residential uses. This block is in close proximity to the commuter rail station and maintains a prominent location at the corner of Kilvert Street and Jefferson Boulevard demanding consideration for a future extension of the Intermodal District. Adding the neighborhood would alleviate some of the hardships present in the existing condition while balancing the physical development at the intersection of Kilvert Street and Jefferson Boulevard. The forthcoming result is the development of macro connectivity within the larger district that maximizes growth opportunities along the Jefferson Boulevard spine of the Intermodal District.”

Page 26, add boundary line to map “future expansion Intermodal or Gateway”

Discussion:

Mr. DePasquale presented for the Board’s consideration the issue of expanding the boundaries of the District.

Mr. Mulhearn stated that he travels through this neighborhood and is concerned about the future of these properties if they are not included in the District. Currently, children are living in these houses and there is no place for them to play. There are no recreational areas. This is a marginal residential location and an isolated neighborhood. These property owners should have the option of being incorporated into the District, in order to benefit from the rezoning of the area.

Mr. Slocum agreed.

Mr. DePasquale asked the consultant, Ben Carlson, about the possibility of these property owners selling out collectively. Mr. Carlson responded that it is not a priority, but that it may be a good idea to include a provision in the Plan that would provide for a gradual transition to the

neighborhood, for example, a one story building shouldn't be overshadowed by a tall building.

3. Regional Sports Facility

The Master Plan should include provisions for a regional sports facility within the target mix of uses than can be supported by the multimodal transportation options. Tthese facilities having shown to provide a source of positive direct and indirect economic benefits in terms of increases in hotel occupancy, restaurant, retail, job growth and multipliers associated with additional spending increasing tax revenues and lending a vibrancy to the District.

Potential amendment:

Amend Page 34: add new paragraph

“Encourage development of a regional sports facility within the target mix of uses within the surrounding area of the Intermodal and Gateway Districts that will be supported by the multimodal transportation options. These facilities have shown to provide a source of positive direct and indirect economic benefits in terms of increases in hotel occupancy, restaurant, retail, job growth and multipliers associated with additional spending increasing tax revenues and lending vibrancy to this District.”

Discussion

Mr. DePasquale presented for the Board's consideration, the inclusion of a regional sports facility within the target mix of uses and stated that a regional sports facility in this area could be a driver of economic development.

Ms. Stenhouse stated that traffic has already been raised as a concern and this could potentially generate a large volume of traffic. Ms. Stenhouse stated that, in her experience, most people arrive at a sports facility by car.

Mr. Mulhearn stated that any development at the Leviton site or north district of Hillsgrove would require the expansion of Jefferson Boulevard. Mr. Mulhearn suggested that this would not be a professional type arena, but could focus on youth sports.

Mr. Carlson stated that it would be necessary to determine where a facility like this could fit into the District. It may be a nice compliment to the proposed uses and would possible fit into the rear portion of the Leviton parcel. As for the traffic, when you mix uses you can expect a reduction in the number of overall trips of up to 40 percent.

Ms. Pisaturo asked, if the Board doesn't add potential uses at this time, would it not be possible to add or make amendments in the future or to amend the Master Plan if the City Council decides they would like to govern.

Mr. Ruggiero responded that yes, the Comprehensive Plan can be amended up to four times per year.

Mr. Mulhearn stated that, in his experience, while it is possible to make changes, it does not come up for consideration often.

Ms. Stenhouse suggested including sky connections to buildings. She is from Minnesota where

many of the buildings are connected by skywalks so that people do not need to walk outside in bad weather. She also stated that that she likes that this Master Plan does not require property owners to sell. Ms. Stenhouse also asked if there were incentives available for developers.

Mr. DePasquale responded that the City has been discussing potential incentives with the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation.

Ms. Stenhouse stated that she sees incentives as a critical piece and that the time is right for this type of development. This should be presented to the state representatives to get initiatives going.

Public Hearing

On a motion by Ms. Stenhouse, seconded by Mr. Slocum, the Planning Board voted unanimously to open the Public Hearing

Mr. John Ash, with property at 140 Imera Avenue stated for the record that the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) had installed monitoring wells through out the District and to his knowledge, no contamination was found.

Mr. Vin Gambardella, with property at 45 Fullerton Road, asked Mr. Carlson about the proposed location of uses on the future plan of the District. He was concerned that his property was shown as a parking garage and that this may limit his options in the future.

Mr. Carlson responded that the uses as shown in the power point were just a conceptual build out.

Ms. Stenhouse asked if there was an owners organization or group that holds meetings about the District.

Mr. Ash responded that there is an owners group, but that it has not been active recently.

Mr. DePasquale stated that there is no Tax Increment Financing and no condemnation or change of uses in the District but it will be a transfer of control from the Station Redevelopment Agency to the Planning Board as an effort to eliminate a level of bureaucracy.

Mr. Ash asked for clarification about this.

Mr. Ruggiero responded that this will be a change in legislative policy. The need for the Agency will vanish and the responsibilities will be transferred to the Planning Board.

Being no further questions or comments, Ms. Stenhouse made a motion to close the Public Hearing. The motion was seconded by Mr. Slocum. All voted in favor, none opposed.

In returning to the memo about changes or potential amendments to the Master Plan, the Chair asked if all Board members were comfortable with the information presented.

Ms. Pisaturo ask if the Board should add language to the Transportation/Traffic amendment and address the second issue regarding the location or limitations on where a sports facility may be located.

Transportation/Traffic

Ms. Pisaturo moved to amend the language regarding transportaion/traffic to eliminate the word “Encourage” in the last sentence. Mr. Slocum seconded the motion. All voted in favor, none opposed.

This sentence will now read:

Amend Page 19: add new paragraph under entitled “Infrastructure Capacity Assessment”

.....**“An access management plan shall be developed for the WSDD including exploiting the feasibility or creating another east west connection over the AMTRAK rail line between the District and the Airport Connector.”**

Regional Sports Facility

The following change was proposed for the language regarding a regional sports facility.

Amend Page 34: add new paragraph

“Encourage development of a regional sports facility within the target mix of uses within the surrounding area, excluding the core district, that will be supported by the multimodal transportation options. The design of such facility, if located along a public street, shall fully support the architectural guidelines as defined in the Master Plan. These facilities have shown to provide a source of positive direct and indirect economic benefits in terms of increases in hotel occupancy, restaurant, retail, job growth and multipliers associated with additional spending increasing tax revenues and lending vibrancy to this District.

On the motion of Ms. Stenhouse, seconded by Ms. Pisaturo, the Planning Board voted unanimously in favor to accept the amended package.

Future Expansion of the District

Mr. Mulhearn suggested including the residential area north of Kilvert Street as a transition area seeking to give the property owners options. He asked the Planning Director about Airport expansion and if the proposed runway expansion would be closer to this neighborhood. Mr. DePasquale responded affirmatively.

Ms. Gerlach suggested leaving the Master Plan as proposed and that the Planning Board could consider amending this in the future if necessary, on a case by case basis.

Mr. Ruggiero asked the Board to consider if it is satisfied that the Master Plan can be expanded as needed.

On the motion of Ms. Pisaturo, seconded by Ms. Gerlach, the Planning Board voted six in favor, with Mr. Mulhearn opposing, to eliminate any and all language regarding expansion of the District from the proposed amendments for the Master Plan.

This will eliminate Amendments to Page 11, Page 12 and Page 26 of the Warwick Station Development District (WSDD) Master Plan.

On the motion of Ms. Stenhouse, seconded by Mr. Kiernan, the Planning Board voted unanimously to formally adopt the Planning Department’s findings and adopt the Warwick Station Development District Mater Plan and amendments, as a replacement for the Warwick Station Redevelopment District Master plan and to include the WSDD Master Plan, as amended, as a functional element of the Comprehensive Plan, with the Planning Department’s recommended stipulations.

On the motion of Ms. Stenhouse, seconded by Ms. Pisaturo, the Planning Board voted unanimously to formally adopt the Planning Department’s findings and to forward favorable recommendation to the City Council for the adoption of the Warwick Station Development District Master Plan and amendments, as a functional element of the Warwick Comprehensive Plan and as a replacement for the Warwick Station Redevelopment District Master Plan, with the Planning Department’s recommended stipulations.

Public Meeting

Planning Board Recommendation to the City Council Regarding the Zoning Text Amendment Relating to the Warwick Station Development District

Applicant: City of Warwick
Location: Warwick Station Redevelopment District
Assessor’s Plats: Portions of 278, 279, 322, 323
Assessor’s Lots: All lots located within the Intermodal and Gateway Zones
Existing Zone : Intermodal, Gateway
Proposed Zone: No change to existing zoning, text amendment only

The Board discussed the language of the proposed text amendment. Ms. Gerlach asked why Use Code 502 is allowed in the Gateway but not allowed in the Intermodal zone and proposed to change Use Code 502 from “no” to “yes” in the Intermodal zone. A motion was made by Ms. Gerlach to amend the actual Use Code 502 as contained in Table 1. Use Regulations to strike “no” under Intermodal and to change to “yes.” The motion was seconded by Ms. Stenhouse. All voted in favor, none opposed.

On the motion of Ms. Stenhouse, seconded by Mr. Kiernan, the Planning Board voted unanimously to formally adopt the Planning Department’s findings and to send a favorable recommendation to the City Council for the adoption of the zoning Text Amendment relating to the Warwick Station Development District, with the approved amendment to the Use Table.

A motion to close the meeting was made by Ms. Stenhouse and seconded by Mr. Slocum at 8:16pm.